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IS FAITH A FORM OF FEELING?

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Like the appeal to faith at large, the tendency to conceive faith as emotion may proceed from various motives. In contrast to an arid intellectualism, or with a view to curing practical corruption, it is urged in furtherance of earnest religious experience. This was the case in the pre-reformation and the Reformation age, and again during the revival in the eighteenth century in England. In eras of doubt the faith of feeling is commended as a substitute for the halting processes of reason, with their dubious or negative conclusions. This motive also was active in the era of renascence and reform, and it has markedly influenced the religious development of later modern times. Such motives, moreover, rest upon a basis of truth. The heart has its rights as well as the head, and its deliverances possess an evidential value. In periods of intellectual change the witness of the heart gains special importance as an aid to faith until the reason can adjust itself to the new conditions. The faith which purifies and the faith which inspires is always the faith which is experienced. These principles need emphasis now less than ever before, for there has never been a period in which they have been so often advocated, and with so great authority, as in the last century and a half. In our own time, in part by voices which have only lately ceased to speak to us, they have been urged with a persuasive eloquence that has carried them throughout the civilized world. Formulated in technical fashion, they have entered into the reflection of the age until they have become one of its most characteristic and most significant philosophies of religion.¹

For practice, however, as well as theory, much depends upon the form of the doctrine. The interpretation of faith solely in

¹ See the writer's *Transitional Eras in Thought*, chap. vi.

terms of feeling contains as many pitfalls as the purely intellectual view of it. Scarcely less dangerous is the view which constantly emphasizes the emotional phase, although it partly recognizes the element of knowledge which is involved in the discernment and in the application of religious truth. From the point of view of logical theory the errors of this emotional interpretation have often been criticised. It has been less commonly noted that it neglects essential laws of the emotional life itself, that the psychology of emotion confirms the logic of belief in its rejection of the sentimental theory. This will appear if we consider in outline the varieties of emotional consciousness. The affective side of consciousness includes phenomena of less and greater complexity and development. Lowest in the scale come the feelings which accompany the exercise of the senses or the simpler impulses and activities. Higher than these, more complex, more developed, more wide-spread in their influence on life, more dependent on individual and social history, on culture, on social as well as physical evolution, are classed the emotions in the stricter meaning of the word. Among the emotions psychology assigns the highest place of all to those which have been termed the sentiments, the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical and religious sentiments of the mind. In some of its forms the conception of faith as emotion tends to class religious consciousness with the simpler rather than with the more developed types of feeling. The mystic's yearning for direct communion with his God, still more his aspiration towards union with the Deity or absorption into him, brings perilously near a sensitive analysis of piety. The apologetic demand for an immediate and certain substitute for reason leads many advocates to a virtual adoption of the same erroneous conclusion. For the sensational view is negatived by psychology as fully as it is by logic and by practical experience. In its beginnings the religious feeling no doubt manifested itself in the simpler and less developed forms of the affective life. And it continues to sustain close relations to the sensitive, and even to the organic and physical, phases of human nature. But from the first it contained in germ the elements of true emotion; while evolved at all, it belongs where by common consent it has long been classed, among the distinct-

ively spiritual phenomena. To refer it now to sense means a return toward primitive attitudes, however lofty the motive by which the retrogressive interpretation is inspired.

Religious feeling, therefore, must be counted emotion in the technical sense. But the established psychology of emotion forbids the resolution of faith into feeling only. An emotion consists of three factors, the idea about which the feeling gathers, the element of feeling proper, the bodily phenomena which follow from this affective state, or, as some contend, precede and produce it. Since the promulgation of the celebrated theory of James and Lange there has been much debate concerning the order of these last two factors and their relative importance. Does the emotion proper affect the body, according to the traditional view? Or does the bodily excitement precede and cause, or by its reflex effects on mind constitute, that which we commonly term the emotional condition? Do we tremble because we are afraid, or are we afraid because we tremble? Do we weep on account of grieving, or is grief the reflex of tears? This discussion, however, hardly affects the principle which we are now considering. Professor James applied his theory primarily to the "coarser emotions," those in which the bodily element is most prominent. But from these the sentiments have long been distinguished, among other differences by the absence of this pronounced physical factor. Or, if this distinction in the scope of the theory be not maintained,² the present argument still remains intact. Whether the emotion produces the bodily echo or the physical excitement produces the affective reflex, in either case a cognitive idea forms the groundwork of the total phenomenon. Pathological and unmotivated cases apart,³ we rejoice or grieve over something, we are amused or saddened or incensed or calmed by something, we regret something, we hope for something, we shrink from something, perceived or represented in memory or imagination. More abstractly, we are devoted to truth, we appreciate beauty, we cleave loyally to the good, we fear God and strive to do his will. Man's emotional life is essentially connected with

² See James's unconvincing discussion, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. ii, pp. 468-470.

³ Cf. James, vol. ii, pp. 458-462.

his cognitive thinking. The phenomena of the one gather about elements which the second supplies. Emotion is not mere feeling; its bodily side apart, it is feeling related to ideas.

These facts make it imperative to take account of the intellectual aspects of religion. The ideas and principles to which faith relates are of moment for faith, even in its emotional phases. The cognitive state around which a religious emotion gathers is a determining factor in the feeling itself. Not, indeed, the sole determining factor. The feeling is essentially a function of the idea, it depends upon it and follows from it. But there are numerous other tendencies which affect the joint result. History, habit, training, culture, even that vague physical and mental complex called temperament, even circumstance and passing conditions, all enter into the possible antecedents of a given emotional state. Individual belief and the collective faith of social groups are alike determined by these and similar causes. But though there are many factors in the genesis of piety, it remains established that the ideas about which pious feeling centres form leading conditions of its appearance and its character. Emotion, moreover, varies with the cognitive content to which it is attached. The element of knowledge is an essential component in the emotional complex; if it be altered, the feeling proper loses its determining basis and is itself liable to change. An apparition, for instance, is shown to be a shadow, and fear gives place to calmness or to amused reflection on the illusion of the immediate past. Good news turns to tidings of disaster, and the once happy throng disperses in sadness or lingers only to give expression to its grief. The shadows fall on distant summits, and delight in the sunset-glow fades into the sterner moods which are also inspired by the view of peak and glacier.

So also with the more personal emotions of which this paper treats. The allegiance of the savage to his chief, the subject's loyalty to his sovereign, the devotion of the citizen to his country and its interests, are examples which may be classed together under patriotic feeling, but it is evident that the several manifestations of the type differ with the stage of political evolution reached, evident also that these variations have to a large degree depended on changes in political ideas. The tribal head, the monarch,

the fatherland, on the one hand, the war-pledge, feudal submission, enlightened patriotism, on the other,—the evolution of ideas and the development of feeling have gone on by parallel stages. The ethical and religious emotions follow the same law. In part the content of duty varies with the view of moral obligation; the moral feelings also experience change, even though duty retain its constraining power. Moral rules may be construed as divine commands, or considered self-evident principles, or conceived as conditions of social welfare. The accompanying moral feelings may in the several cases bear the same names, but in character they inevitably differ. Even if for a time the effects of inheritance and training outweigh the influence of personal reflection, in the event the several tendencies will work out their due results. Of this the history of morals supplies abundant experimental proof.⁴ The case of religion is even clearer than the case of morals. Fear has grown to reverence, propitiation has developed into worship, other-worldliness has been so far replaced by the religion of the present that it is not always easy to maintain our devotion to the Unseen. It would be idle to contend that these alterations of attitude and feeling have gone on independently of intellectual change. Analysis and history combine to show the contrary. It is impossible to construe such phases of the religious consciousness merely in terms of emotion, if one mean by emotion feeling devoid of cognitive attachments. Fear and reverence and worship and devotion,—the terms themselves connote a mingling of cognitive and affective states.

The emotional analysis of faith misconceives these aspects of religious experience. Religious consciousness contains cognitive as well as emotional (and volitional) elements. The affective factors depend upon the cognitive, and vary with them. Hence the resolution of faith into mere feeling overlooks an essential element in the total phenomenon, while the predominantly sentimental interpretation is in part guilty of the same mistake. On the other hand the emotional analysis is not entirely erroneous. It may be relatively justified by historical conditions, as shown

⁴ The evolution of French culture since the beginning of the Revolutionary era may be cited as one of many illustrations which cannot be considered here.

in the beginning of this paper. It rightly distinguishes between primary religious ideas and their reflective interpretation in terms of abstract dogma. In addition it can plead a basis in general mental fact, even though its principal contentions run counter to the results of psychological inquiry. For in the psychology of religious feeling, as everywhere in the emotional life, the laws established are subject to marked limitations. The emotion proper depends upon cognition, and changes with this. But the element of feeling, as we have also noted, is but one among many constituents of the joint affective state. That is to say, we are dealing with an exceedingly complex phenomenon, whose complexity, moreover, is accentuated by other conditions characteristic of emotional states. Emotions are characterized, for instance, by a wide range of divergence, so that even those which are classed together may also greatly differ. We speak of fear, or love, or grief, and these class-designations rest upon fact; but psychologists recognize that such names denote no fixed and self-identical types. There are different fears and loves and griefs—and so with the rest—into whose composition, still to borrow the figure from the physical world, there enters not merely a large, but also a highly mutable, body of constituents. Once more, emotions are unstable, as well as complex and mutable. The many diverse factors out of which they are built up are not compacted into a closely integrated whole. In them the web of consciousness is loosely, rather than compactly, woven. The strands are not so knitted together that to separate them will destroy the fabric. On the contrary, the looseness is equal to the differentiation, and is the ground of a parallel function. The several factors in an emotion not only differ with varying conditions; they are so loosely joined that substitution becomes an easy process, often without notable change in the phenomenon as a whole.

Hence follow several limitations of the general law which are relatively favorable to the emotional theory of faith. Religious feeling depends on knowledge, but not on knowledge alone. The religious emotions centre about ideas and doctrines, but the connection is not so close as the intellectualist, not to say the dogmatist, maintains. Changes of religious sentiment accompany alterations in belief, but the variation of the two factors is not

always direct, or immediate, or equal in extent. The cognitive phase may greatly alter, and yet for the time the phase of feeling undergo but little change. Under certain conditions, when the intellectual variation is in incidentals rather than in essentials, in particular if it concerns the dogmatic formulation rather than the primary content of religious belief, the affective factor may continue permanently the same. Here is evident the foundation for the claims of the sentimental view. Since the dependence of feeling on cognition is not absolute, the way is open to declare the former independent of its mate. As the co-variation may fail to be immediate or complete, it is possible to dwell upon the persistence of pious feeling amid the vicissitudes of doctrinal change. The necessity for religion of a living personal experience reinforces the tendencies born of intellectual need. In times of doubt the doctrine, exaggeration though it be, is often nobly used to confirm belief or to encourage troubled souls in their search for peace.

Certain of our examples of the general law may serve to illustrate its limitations also. The evolution of loyalty has paralleled the evolution of political ideas, but patriotism persists in a remarkable measure. Ethics changes, but the present generation has learned with pleased surprise how strong the sentiment of duty may remain amid the fluctuations of ethical theory. Few phenomena of the second half of the nineteenth century have been less expected than the maintenance, even the deepening, of moral feeling which has gone on, although several of the prevailing forms of thought have included elements which tend to undermine it. In regard to religious faith the matter was finely stated by Auguste Sabatier in his *Philosophie de la religion*. Dealing there with the evolution of dogma, he thus describes a religious assembly:

Here, in one of our temples, is assembled a great company for worship. Among this audience perchance there are poor old women, very ignorant and somewhat superstitious, men of the middle class with a little literary culture, scholars and philosophers who have reflected on Kant and Hegel, even professors of theology penetrated to the marrow by the critical spirit. All bow in spirit and worship; all use the same language learned in childhood; all repeat with heart and lips: *I believe in God, the Father almighty*. I do not know whether there is on earth a more touching spectacle, anything nearer heaven.

All these different souls, who perhaps would be incapable of understanding one another in the realm of mere intellect, really commune with one another; a common religious sentiment penetrates and animates them. The moral unity of which Jesus spoke when he said, "That they may be one as we are one," is for the moment realized on earth. But do you believe that the word God, pronounced by all lips, arouses in all these souls the same image? The poor dame, who remembers still the illustrations in her big Bible, imagines the Father eternal with a long white beard, and eyes shining and burning like coals. Her neighbor would smile at this naïve anthropomorphism. He has the deistic notion, rationally demonstrated to him in his course of philosophy at school. But this notion in turn would seem crude to the Kantian, who knows that every positive idea of God is contradictory, and who, to escape the contradiction, takes refuge in the idea of the Unknowable. For all, however, God subsists, and it is because God is present and living in all, that the word lends itself to so many different acceptations; but, note this point, the word lives only because it serves to express a piety which is felt (*ressentie*) and common. The life of dogma is in piety.⁵

The law of the concomitant variation of idea and feeling is thus limited and not absolute. But it is to be noted that the limiting conditions do not make void the underlying principle. They remain limitations merely, so that when a certain measure of alteration is passed, the phenomena revert to the type which the law demands. If patriotism persists amid political change, it encounters perils unknown before altered conditions, among them strange conceptions of the state, had led on to anti-militarism, internationalism, or even to anarchistic views. There is nothing finer in later modern culture than the union of moral earnestness with negative opinion; nevertheless it is clear that ethical positions have altered with the intellectual development, and further, that several of the moral dangers of the time depend on conclusions which follow from agnostic premises. And Sabatier's argument itself, despite the glowing spirituality by which it is pervaded, suggests an inference contrary to the view which he defends. In an age of religious transition it is indeed well to draw the boundaries of faith as wide as the truth will in any wise permit. The

⁵ Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'après la psychologie et l'histoire, pp. 303 f.

spirit of the time requires support beyond that which the precision of intellect would grant. Burdened individual souls should not be held too straitly to theoretical formulas. And the thinker who does not feel the need of relief has himself scarcely experienced, or has happily surmounted, the tendencies of his own time. In the event, however, individuals and ages must conform to the inevitable law. It might almost be said that there is a duty laid upon us so to adapt our feelings to that which we hold to be true. As sincere and reasonable men, ought we to worship an unknowable force as though it were a personal God? Are there not ethical questions involved in our spiritual attitude as well as doctrines and religious interests? But this phase of the matter need not now be pressed. It has often been brought elsewhere to the attention of thinking men. And it is the psychological aspect of the problem which is here especially in point. Whether or not we believe that feeling ought to follow knowing, it is certain that eventually it will follow it. It is in the nature of the psychical conditions that, when the cognitive basis fundamentally varies, the emotional accompaniments will also change. They may not do so at once, or completely, but in the end essential variation is sure. Analytical psychology, moreover, is confirmed by historical psychology. The biographies of religious thinkers often show the alterations of feeling which accompany changes in belief, albeit these may have been reached only after hesitancy and suffering. The history of religion at large—notably in the modern age—is evidence of the same concomitant evolution. Faith, therefore, cannot reasonably be analyzed into feeling alone. For feeling here is in part a function of knowledge. The sentimental theory is almost as one-sided as the intellectualism which it seeks to supplant. If it lays stress on factors in belief which need to be emphasized, over-emphasis involves both theoretical and practical dangers. Religious faith includes elements both of knowing and of feeling. These interact in an organic and living way. Psychology, as well as logical theory, forbids the endeavor to construe it in terms of either one apart, or to minimize either at the expense of its fellow.